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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [HR](#) [KO](#)  
SUBJECT: LEADER OF SERBS IN CROATIA CALLS FOR DELAYING  
RECOGNITION OF KOSOVO

REF: ZAGREB 243

Classified By: Ambassador Robert A. Bradtke for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Milorad Pupovac, a respected leader of Croatia's Serbs, met with the Ambassador March 13 to argue for a further delay in Croatian recognition of Kosovo's independence. Pupovac said that he expected that Croatia, along with one or more countries in the region, would recognize Kosovo's independence next week (reftel). Pupovac explained that he had met with President Mesic's foreign policy advisor Budimir Loncar to propose a delay until after the Serb elections in May, and he was seeking to make his case to Prime Minister Sanader as well.

¶2. (C) As part of his proposal, Pupovac said that he would be willing to travel to both Kosovo and Belgrade. In Kosovo, where Pupovac has worked in the past to support moderate Serb elements, he would seek a meeting with the Kosovar Albanian leadership to inform them that Croatia would recognize Kosovo but needed more time, given the sensitivity of Croat-Serb relations. In Belgrade, he would try to meet with Serb leaders to argue for realism in dealing with Kosovo and to reiterate that Croatian recognition of Kosovo was inevitable.

¶3. (C) In presenting his ideas to the Ambassador, Pupovac repeated arguments he has made previously about the damage that recognition of Kosovo would do to relations between Croatians and Serbs inside Croatia, as well as to relations between Croatia and Serbia. Croatia's Serbs had not demonstrated against Kosovo's declaration of independence, when Serb communities in Slovenia and even the U.S. had done so. This, Pupovac claimed, was the result of the leadership of moderates such as himself. Recognition of Kosovo's independence would undercut his influence. The reaction of Belgrade was also unpredictable. All of this would affect the prospects for further return of Serbian refugees to Croatia. In view of all the possible negative consequences, Pupovac maintained it would be better to proceed more slowly on recognition, and he asked for the Ambassador's support.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador acknowledged that recognition of Kosovo was a difficult decision, but stated that further delay would not make this decision easier. No outcome of the Serb elections was likely to make a Croatian decision on recognition more palatable to Belgrade. Further delay could also make some in Belgrade hope that they could reverse the steady increase in the number of countries recognizing Kosovo. The Ambassador made clear that he could not offer Pupovac any encouragement or support for his initiative.

¶5. (C) Subsequently, on March 14, the Ambassador discussed Pupovac's proposal with Mesic advisor Loncar, and asked whether Mesic supported it. Loncar said that it was his view and Mesic's that nothing could be achieved by delaying

recognition or by Pupovac's travel to Pristina and Belgrade.  
Loncar said that he continued to expect Croatia would  
recognize Kosovo's independence next week, in tandem with  
Hungary.  
Bradtke